

*THE*  
**ART**  
*OF THE KINGDOM OF*  
**BENIN**



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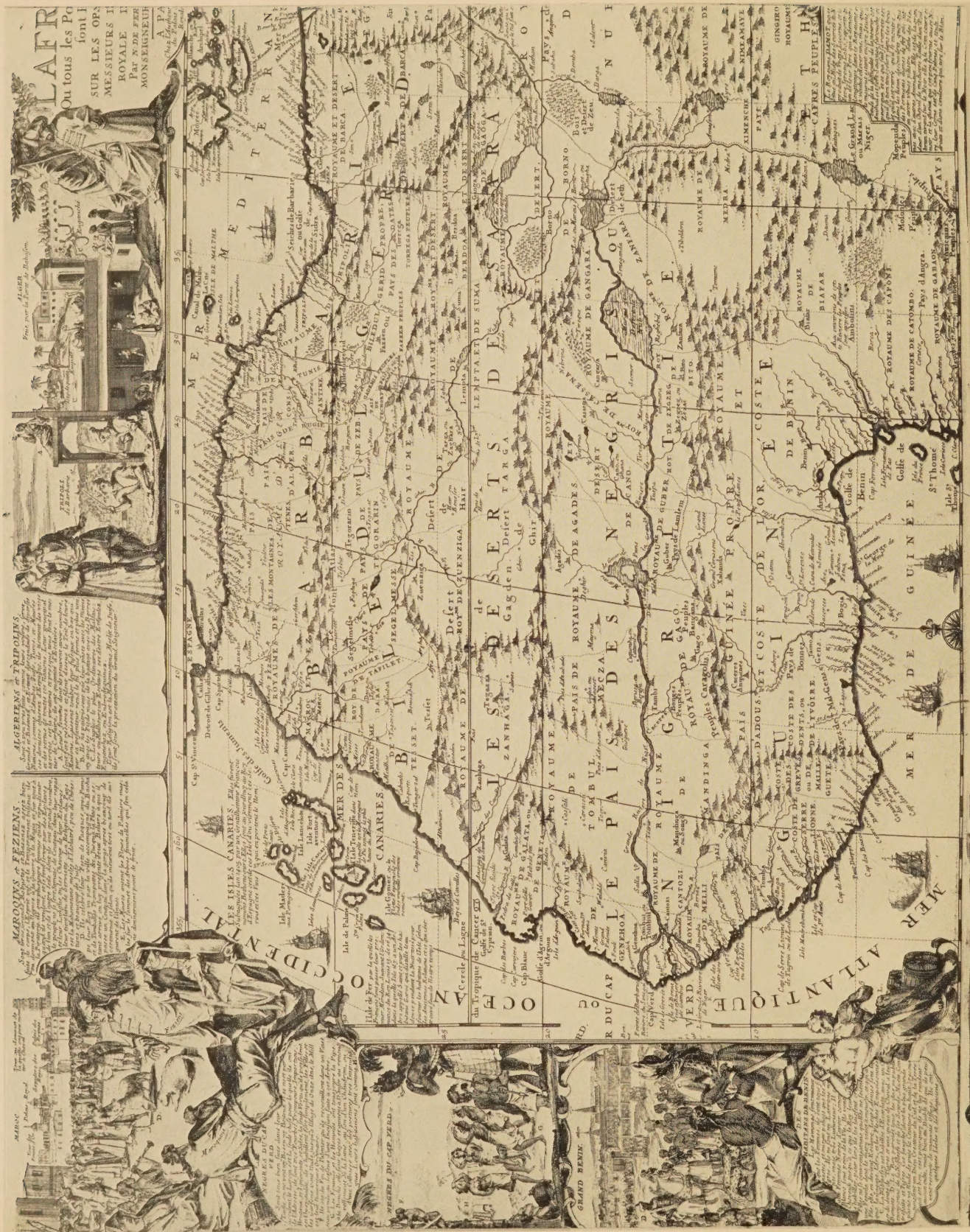
BRONZES AND IVORIES  
FROM THE OLD KINGDOM  
OF BENIN

*Exhibition*

FROM NOVEMBER 25 TO DECEMBER 14  
1935

*At the Galleries of*  
M. KNOEDLER AND COMPANY  
14 EAST 57 STREET NEW YORK CITY





« L'Afrique où tous les points principaux sont placez, sur les observations de Messieurs de l'Académie Royale des Sciences, par N. de Fer, géographe de Monseigneur le Dauphin.  
A Paris, chez l'auteur, dans l'Isle du Palais, à la Sphère Royale, 1698. »

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Carte - Knecht - Gallen



# I N T R O D U C T I O N

*It is not known under what the ivories of Benin, exhibited at the Trocadero Museum in 1932, have of Kings of France. Is it precious vestiges have kept years, in the Cabinet des thèque Nationale, with the cup King, with the Cameo of the game of chess of Charlemagne ?*



*conditions and at what date bited at the Trocadero entered into the collection not significant that these company for so many Médailles of the Biblio- of Chosroes, the Sassanide Sainte-Chapelle and with the*

*Homage to the unique beauty paid at the time when only casual allusions were made by such chroniclers as the brothers de Bry, Dapper, Van Nyendael to the greatness of a civilisation wich blossomed for six entire centuries in the Kingdom of Benin.*

*Homage wich was renewed in 1919 by the great German scholar Felix von Luschan, when he wrote : " Benvenuto Cellini himself could not have made better casts, nor anyone else before or since to the present day ".*

*Certain collectors of the past in attempt to justify their own admiration before these bronzes which are the pride of the British Museum and Berlin Museum, sought to credit the Portuguese, who sailed the waters of West Africa Coast, with these bronzes.*

*Specialists as eminent as Maurice Delafosse, through rigorous ethnographical research, have duly rectified this false belief. Historians have joined the ethnologists in establishing the character, essentially African, of these bronzes and ivories, wich furnish a historical document without parallel for the study of the art of Black Africa.*

*No wonder that Louis Carré, authority of long standing on French silverware, of which he has made known so many masterpieces, has also given his interest to the art of Benin to the extent of assembling a collection, unique in the hands of a private person, of the most beautiful pieces of the finest periods.*

*Georges-Henri RIVIÈRE.  
Sous-Directeur du Musée du Trocadéro.*

# THE ROYAL ART OF BENIN

*« Je suis plus traditionnel que l'on croit. »*

Paul CÉZANNE.

The study of history and art of Africa has been unduly neglected until our times. The scientific exploration of Pharaonic Dynastic history is not older than the Nineteenth century and the interest for the Egypto-Coptic art and the Moslem art date only from yesterday. In spite of the fact that the Egyptian civilizations, as well as the ancient Ethiopian Kingdom of Axoum, have left important monuments in stone, they failed to draw the attention of scientists. No wonder that the other African civilizations which did not express themselves in durable material have drawn little notice from historians. However, there existed in Africa, empires, glorious and powerful, which have disappeared without leaving substantial trace of their grandeur. The Kingdom of Benin has written the history of its civilization into ivory and bronze, and it is because of that and thanks to a mere accident, that the Kingdom of Benin has made its entrance into the history of art in 1897.

Even a long time after the Champollion's discovery, Egyptian monuments baffled the European taste by their oddity. The book which Maspero published in 1886, on Egyptian archeology, produced nothing short of a scandal as the result of his ideas which, at that time, were considered merely paradoxal. And it took twenty years, according to Maspero himself, "to create a public sufficiently familiar with the art and ideas of Pharaohs that would accept without revolt these artistic manifestations so opposed to our modern taste." This was in 1906. Still in 1926, Charles Boreux, curator of the Musée du Louvre, complains in his book on Egyptian art that the superficial observer reacts to Egyptian art as "cold, artificial and immobile." One should not be surprised, consequently, that an analogous judgement and identical accusations were also raised against the African art in general and Benin in particular, but the time is at hand when the sculptures of Benin will be as accepted and famed as those of classic art rendered familiar to us by the grammar school text books.

Among the great Negro Empires, the Empires of Sudan, known to the Arab historians were distinctly opposed to those of the Gulf of Guinea. The first ones (Empires of Ghana, of Mali, of Shangay) were placed on the latitude of the High and Middle Niger. In the beginning of the Seventh century, the Moslem influence was preponderant and the region was finally subjected to the religion of Islam.

The Kingdoms of the Bay of Guinea resisted the Moslem penetration and preserved their antique religion of the highest development. They were more powerful than the preceding and on a superior plane of civilization. Such were, among others, the kingdoms of Ashanti, of Dahomey, and of Benin.

During seven centuries, the Kingdom of Benin dominated the territory that to-day forms but a portion of the British colony of the Nigeria situated in between the Dahomey and Cameroon. The capital, the City of Benin, now 35,000 inhabitants, was situated seventy-three miles from the coast of the Gulf of Guinea.



According to their own tradition, the Benins came in the Twelfth century from the Yoruba, country situated to the North-West of their present habitat. In the absence of any written history, it is difficult to determine the degree of influence upon the Kingdom of Benin of the great civilizations, before its direct contact with Europeans. It is problematic whether the ancient Greek and Roman colonies on the Mediterranean exerted any influence on the Benins, and while the Egyptian influence seems probable, there is no absolute proof of it. It is impossible to find any great definite current of influence before the Islamic drive from the Red Sea towards the Atlantic, in the Seventh century. It was the Arabs who first established permanent relations with the Negro Empires of Sudan and the Mediterranean coast. Two great caravan routes of commercial traffic, one coming from Morocco to the West, the other from the Nile to the East, terminated at the elbow of the Niger River. But beyond this, toward the South, there existed numerous small commercial routes, and it is not impossible that certain of the cultured elements of Egyptian, Byzantine, and Mediterranean civilizations in general, had infiltrated as far as the shores of the gulf of Guinea.

However, it is mostly through the maritime routes, that the Kingdom of Benin had relations with the outside, and in particular with the European world. As early as the Thirteenth century the Genoese had reached the coast of Guinea, and at the end of the Fourteenth century, seafarers from Dieppe reached the Gold Coast. But it was for the Portuguese to be the first, twenty years before the discovery of America, to land in Benin. Navigator Alonso d'Aveiro was permitted to enter the city of Benin in 1486. He solicited the sending of an ambassador from Benin to Portugal. Stories brought by this ambassador were a great surprise to the Portuguese. When he told them that the King of Benin wore, among his other insignia, a cross of bronze, the Portuguese thought that they had to do with a Christian prince and went as far as to identify him with the fabulous John the Priest, the supposed Emperor of Abyssinia.

In 1600, the brothers de Bry gave the first description of the City of Benin, in which they said that the main street stretched out of sight in the distance and was seven or eight times as wide as the main street of Amsterdam. Half a century later, in 1668, the Dutch traveller Dapper enthusiastically described the Great City of Benin. The city was bound on one side by a wall two and a half yards in height, covered with red clay and was protected on the other side by swamps. The capital was laid out in a perfect system of thirty avenues hundred and twenty feet wide, crossing each other at right angles. The houses built of red clay, polished like marble, were reminiscent of the construction in *impluvium* of ancient Rome. The King's Palace alone, was as large as the Dutch city of Haarlem. The inner courts were connected by covered galleries, supported by wooden columns, and faced with bronze plaques depicting "battle scenes and warriors deeds". The roof was embellished with numerous towers surmounted by bronze birds. These accurate observations have been confirmed by the bronze and ivories that have reached us; but, of the architecture, as remarkable as the works of art, no specimen, not even ruins, exist.

A civil war that lasted ten years, from 1691 to 1701, put an end to the prosperity of Benin. The Dutch traveller Van Nyendael, who had visited Benin around 1700, found the city in ruins. Van Nyendael was impressed by the existence of unusual bronze heads surmounted by carved ivory tusks. He also noticed the immense serpents of bronze curled in spirals around the towers of the King's Palace. However, he no longer mentioned the bronze plaques adorning the columns. Columns were made of wood with carvings so crude that it was difficult to discern the figures. It is presumed that the bronze plaques, stripped off the pillars during the civil war, were thrown in store-rooms where the English found them in 1897. No traveller after Van Nyendael has ever mentioned their existence.

In the course of the Eighteenth century, the city rose from ruins, only to be destroyed again in 1820. Little by little the country withdrew itself from the Europeans. The Portuguese left the Coast. In 1885, the coast line passed under the British control. The Kingdom itself became a British colony after the massacre of January 1897 of the British Consul J. R. Phillips, and of eight other



Europeans. On February 12th, twelve hundred British marines landed in Benin. Five days later, the capital was captured and destroyed by sword and fire. The King Overami, the 23rd and the last King of Benin, accompanied only by two of his nine hundred wives, was deported to Calabar where he died in 1914.

While previously it had known a brilliant civilization, the Kingdom had fallen into decadence long before the English occupation. It had a religion comparable by its rites and ceremonies to the great religions and a structure of a very strict social hierarchy. A brief summary of this civilisation would be the best explanation of the Benin works of art that came down to us.

The monarch, a semi-divine personage, was both king and high priest. Surrounded by an array of dignitaries, clients and servants, he remained within the confines of the royal palace. All the men of Benin were considered to be his slaves, all land was his property; no one could inherit without his consent. He had a great number of wives and concubines. According to Dapper, his harem consisted of nine hundred wives guarded by eunuchs.

The King had a privy council of high dignitaries who, in accordance with tradition, were descendants of the princes who ruled the country before the advent from Yoruba of King Eweka, in the Twelfth century. To counterbalance the influence of this council, King Ewuare, in the Fifteenth century, created a non-hereditary class of nobility from which the high military and civil dignitaries were recruited.

Around the King and this aristocracy gravitated the personnel of the Court, divided into four classes of free men, among which were : chamberlains, counsellors, huntsmen, palace-guards, sacrificial priests, nude youths who wore no clothes until the King had dressed them and who always were at hand, keepers of the tame leopards, and others.

Among the most important Kings of Benin were : Eweka, who came from Ifa and who founded the dynasty during the middle of the Twelfth century; Oguole, who fortified the city; Esige, who received the first Portuguese at the end of the Fifteenth century, and Osogboa who discovered lands rich in salt.

According to Dapper, in case of war, the King could muster an army of twenty thousand well-armed men in a day, and if need be, eighty or a hundred thousand. The second most important personage in the Kingdom was the commander-in-chief of the army, who, in case of defeat, had his head struck off.

The sacerdotal aspect of the king's power and the human sacrifices constituted the outstanding traditions of Benin religion. At the yearly anniversary of his father's death several slaves, permitted to become intoxicated with rum prior to the ceremony, were sacrificed to serve the deceased king in the beyond. Human sacrifices were also offered on the feast of the Coral. On this occasion, the King dressed from head to foot in coral bestowed the high insignia of Coral on his favorites which were returned to the king on the death of the recipient. Other occasions of sacrifice were practised on the feast of the rain, of the sun, of good health, and whenever the city was menaced by an enemy, or at the funeral ceremonies of king's death. The king's favorites disputed the honor to accompany him to his hunting grounds after his death.

A great wealth of mythology lay at the base of the Benin religion. The chief god was called Osa. He was the son of the god Ogbora who was so far above anything human that it was superfluous to render him any homage. Osa ruled the heaven and the earth and dwelt himself in the East. He accepted no human sacrifices, but goats, oxen and fowl. Three other gods were almost given the same rank as Osa : Ogiwu, the god of thunder, his wife Obiemi, who was called "our mother", and finally Olokun, the god of the sea and consequently the god of wealth, residing in the West.



Certain dignitaries were appointed as high priests to the cults of the various gods. The king himself seemed to be in rapport with the god of thunder, since he was portrayed with the curved axe, the attribute of this god. Moreover, certain animals were dedicated to the royal office. Tame leopards were kept in the palace and took part in the ceremonial appearances of the king. The catfish, the crocodile and the serpent are represented on the plaques of bronze in connection with royalty.

The people of Benin displayed a great ability in overseas commerce and industry. They imported gold and silver thread fabrics, vermillion velvet and the flowered textiles of Haarlem, sweet lavender, mirrors and horse-shoe shaped armlets in bronze called manilla. They sold their own cotton fabrics to many lands and as far as Brazil. They traded slaves to Europeans but only females, as the exportation of men was prohibited. Spices, jasper, leopard skins, ivory and blue beads, comprised additional items of their trade. Their weavers were schooled in the use of blue, green, yellow, red and black vegetable dyes. They possessed smiths, carpenters, tanners and skilled workers in various other crafts. However, it was in the arts of ivory carving and bronze casting that they excelled and gave the full measure of their civilization. In the refinements of this last domain, they were destined to reach the perfection of the European technique.

It was only after the fall of the Kingdom, in 1897, that the art of Benin became known in Europe. However, for a long time ivory carvings were collected by princely amateurs. The collections of Armbraser and Weickmann, in the Museum of Ulm, consist of examples brought to Europe before 1600. The cabinet of Kings of France contained other specimens of ivories. But no trace of any object in bronze is found in Europe before 1897.

The specimens of bronze and ivory found in the royal palace of Benin by the English expedition, when brought back to England, caused a great surprise. The curator Charles Read, deployed vain efforts to secure the collection for the British Museum. But the British Admiralty decided to sell the bronzes and the ivories at auction as war booty. At this auction, the German Museums were represented by a single delegate and the British Museum was to sustain a severe competition. Of the total number of 2,400 bronzes that the Benin historian von Luschan counted, only 289 found their way to the British Museum, while 580 are in the Völkerkunde Museum in Berlin, 196 in the Hamburg Museum, 182 in the Dresden Museum, 76 in the Cologne Museum and 51 in the Museum of Frankfurt a. M. the General Pitt Rivers ("money with him being no object") succeeded in assembling an important collection for his Museum of Farnham, Dorset, England. Several specimens, acquired by an auctioneer from Oxford, eventually entered various museums and private collections. And so, after the rush of museums was satisfied, not counting the few specimens kept by members of the expedition as war trophies, Ling Roth wrote in his book on Great Benin under the title "On the British loss of antique Works of Art from Benin", "It is especially annoying to Englishmen to think that such fine specimens... of bronze casting and ivory carving... which should... be retained in this country, have been allowed to go abroad."

It was at first believed and asserted that European influence, namely Portuguese, was responsible for these bronzes. This fallacy was later completely exploded by such scholarly researches as that of Charles Read, Ling Roth, Felix von Luschan, Maurice Delafosse and Eckart von Sydow. "It has been at times asserted" wrote Maurice Delafosse, in *Les Nègres*, Rieder, Paris pp. 25-27, "that the craftsmanship of bronze casting, which seemed to have reached its full blossom in the Fifteenth century, was of the Portuguese inspiration. This opinion seems to me unsustainable. In the first place, there are definite reasons to believe that the art of bronze casting existed there long before the first Portuguese vessel sailed the gulf of Guinea. And in the second place, it is sufficient to examine a group of bronzes from Benin to be convinced that the inspiration of the artists is fundamentally Negro."



Of course, there have been occasions when the Benin bronze casters represented European types. "Would one say", writes Von Luschan "that Chinese porcelain comes from Germany just because the coat of arms of some noble families of Brandenburg are found on certain Chinese plates". "These works of art are purely native, in treatment", concludes Charles Read. "The style is thoroughly African," states Ling Roth, who also says that nothing is known of Portuguese art that bears out in the least any analogy with the bronzes of Benin. It stands to reason that no art has ever been developed by a country entirely withdrawn from contact with the other countries. Certain pieces of Benin are reminiscent of the Fatimide art (Egypt, X-XIth centuries); others suggest Byzantine art, and others seem to have been made to satisfy the demand of some European clientele. One can justly say that there is less Portuguese influence on the Benin art of the Sixteenth century than there is Italian influence on the French art of the Eighteenth century.

The technique of Benin bronzes is not the least remarkable part of this art. These bronzes were made according to the difficult process of casting *à la cire perdue*, which method produced the most exquisite bronzes. It permits only one example to be cast from the mould so that every bronze of Benin is a unique specimen. This is the resumé of the process. The object to be cast is first modeled in wax. Around the wax model is built a form of clay. After being treated with heat, the wax is melted out through holes in the clay form. Into this clay form, the molten bronze composed of an alloy of tin and brass is poured. To obtain the finished casting, the clay mould is broken away, resulting in the destruction of the only remaining pattern. Such fine and delicate process requires the skill of master craftsmen.

It is evident that all the sculptures of Benin are not of the same quality. Since von Luschan counted 2.400 pieces, it goes without saying that great differences exist, depending as much upon the talent of the artist as on the epoch in which the sculptures were made. There are not many pieces in existence that characterize the works of the early period of Benin art. Moreover, one must distinguish between the original sculptures of great artists and the posterior copies of craftsmen. Von Luschan remarks that the bronzes with fine patine are rare. These are usually older, of better cast and of the utmost freedom of expression. In Benin art, fine technique and plastic beauty go hand in hand.

Parallel to the chronology of the Kings of Benin, Bernard Struck has established a historical classification of the bronzes and ivories that allows us to date the objects with a degree of surety. The following classification is a summing up after Herman Baumann :

*The archaic period* (1140 to 1360) begins with the first King of Benin, Eweka, and continues until the dynastic struggle of 1360. To this period would belong the small round bells, the fragments depicting personages on horseback in the Museums of Dresden and Berlin, as well as the bearded warrior with bulging eyes in the Berlin Museum.

*The ancient period* (1360 to 1500) has produced particularly the most famous portrait heads of princesses.

*The classical period* (1500 to 1691) divides itself into three sub-periods; first : 1500-1575; second : 1575-1648; third : 1648-1691. This period is, in bronze and ivory, the eulogy of all the public and private life of Benin. Now appear the great heads of the winged-type, portraying the King Akenbedo; the feminine heads in pointed head-gear of the queen-dowagers; and statues of king, of musicians, of horsemen, warriors, and a whole crowd of little people, twelve inches high, on the bronze plaques, in various and sumptuous dresses such as have been seen by the first voyagers. Leopards, serpents, cocks and mules form the ceremonial escort of the king. The magnificence of this period does not stop at that. Numerous ivory carvings of unheard of refinement complete the picture : articles of ladies-apparel, table use, jewels and adornment.



*The late period* (1701 to 1820). During this period, except the famous dwarf figures of the Vienna Museum, no creative works seem to have been done. Artisans copy the models of old masters. The work, heavy and awkward, has started to degenerate. Portrait heads and figures of cocks in wood replace the bronze masterpieces of old at the annual feasts.

*The modern period* (1830 to 1897). This period spells the end of the Benin art. The king even forbides the bronze casting.

The art of Benin is far removed from the geometric stylization which, under the name of "art nègre" became the fashion of Paris of a few years ago. It has been supposed that the essence of African art was a geometric sculpture, more or less of indigenous nature. However, it is the art of Benin that represents the true face of African art at its best.

Like all the arts of powerful and resourceful epochs, the art of Benin sought its verity in other planes than merely anatomical canons. The conventions that liberate it from parallelism with reality constitute its style.

Certain masterpieces of the art of Benin are worthy of antiquity. It is not in the superficial aspect that resides the kinship of works of art, but in the equivalence of their inner power.

LOUIS CARRÉ.

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❧ I. PORTRAIT OF A PRINCESS.

*Bronze. Ancient Period (1360-1500).*

8 7/8 inches high.

She wears a head-dress of beads (agate or coral) with a large pearl between the eyes. Two fringes hang from each side. There are three scarifications over the eyes which are inlaid with iron. A collar of pearls around the neck forms the pedestal.

This head, as all the others in this collection, has a circular hole in the top probably to hold a large carved elephant tusk as described in n° 19. Nyendaël, in 1701, was impressed by this arrangement which was still in existence in 1891 in the sanctuary of the King's palace (See Ling Roth, *Great Benin*, Halifax, 1903, p. 79), but there were only winged heads and it is not sure that all the heads were used as tusk holders. The back of the head has been partly damaged, as if the head had been crudely torn from its mounting. A similarly damaged specimen is in the Pitt-Rivers Museum (See *catalogue of the Pitt-Rivers Museum*, pl. 14).

REPRODUCED : Louis Réau, *Histoire Universelle des Arts*, vol. II, p. 21, Paris 1934.— Georges Hilaire, *Beaux-Arts*, Juillet 1931.— Dr. Lehmann, *Die Weltkunst*, Juillet 1931.— *Cahiers d'Art*, 1932, n° 3, p. 216.

EXHIBITED : Bronzes et Ivoires du Royaume de Bénin, Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 53. — Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1935, n° 204.





1. PORTRAIT OF A PRINCESS. *Bronze. Ancient Period (1360-1500)*



## ❧ 2. PORTRAIT OF A YOUTH.

*Bronze. Ancient Period (1360-1500).*

8 1/8 inches high.

The hair is dressed in overlapping layers. Over each eyebrow are four vertical scarifications and, between these, two longer vertical apertures which have been inlaid with iron. A close-fitting collar of pearls around the neck supports the head.

This specimen closely resembles the one in the British Museum (reproduced in Read and Dalton, *Antiquities from the city of Benin..... in the British Museum*, London, 1899, pl. IX, n° 3) about which Read and Dalton wrote : "The skill with which the casting has been done is remarkable, the metal being unusually thin" (*op. cit.*, p. 43). Another head of the same type is found in the Pitt Rivers Museum. In the Pitt Rivers Museum, the two specimens similar to n° 1 and n° 2 of this catalogue are quoted as the best heads in the Museum (*Cat.*, p. 28).

REPRODUCED : *Cahiers d'Art*, 1932, n° p. 3, 216.

EXHIBITED : Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 51. — Museum of Modern Art, New-York, 1935, n° 266.

## ❧ 3. IVORY HEAD OF A NOBLEMAN OF BENIN.

*Classical Period (1500-1691).*

8 1/8 inches high.

The hair is dressed in overlapping layers. The forehead is hidden by a band of four rows of pearls, with a rosette of beads on the temples. A coral necklace conceals the chin. The mask is surrounded by an openwork frieze decorated with figures of cat fish.

This pendant, which was surely affixed to a King's garment in the manner shown by Read and Dalton (*op. cit.*, pl. 16, n° 5) is, as far is known, the only one in existence representing a masculine face. The other specimens are all feminine as, for instance, the famous one in the British Museum (See *Handbook to the ethnographical collections*, pl. 11).

REPRODUCED : *Cahiers d'Art*, 1932, n° 3, p. 202. — Henry Clouzot, *l'Afrique vous parle*, *Revue Mondiale*, Août 1933, p. 18.





2. PORTRAIT OF A YOUTH *Bronze. Ancient Period (1360-1500)*



#### ⌚ 4. PORTRAIT OF A PRINCESS.

*Bronze. Ancient Period (1360-1500).*

9 5/8 inches high.

She wears a cap of interlaced beadwork on both sides of which are rosettes of large pearls. Bead pendants hang from the sides; a bead encloses the end of each braid of hair. Three scarifications, the distinctive marks of the inhabitants of Benin, are incised above the eyes. Eyes are inlaid with iron. A high collar of coral beads hides the lower part of the face up to the mouth. The chin shoves the collar forward.

This head is referred to as being of the same type as the one in the Leyden Museum. "They are exceptionally good, of the greatest beauty, very carefully finished, all of the best period of Benin art, all also remarkable for a beautiful old brown or dark green patine". (Von Luschan, *Alterthümer von Benin*, Berlin, 1919, p. 355).

#### ⌚ 5. PORTRAIT OF A PRINCESS.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

9 5/8 inches high.

Se wears the same cap and the same collar of beadwork as the preceding specimen. The fittings which hang from each side of the face are made of six rows of coral beads. The end of each braid of hair is terminated with a pearl.

A high collar of twenty rows of pearls hides the chin. Between the eyes a bead is affixed to the head-dress. The eyes are inlaid with iron and surmounted by the usual scarifications in relief.

#### ⌚ 6. PORTRAIT OF A PRINCESS.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

16 inches high.

She wears a high pointed coiffure adorned with a head-dress of coral network. Rosettes are on the temples. The chin is protected by the traditional high collar of coral.

This type of head was made especially famous by the specimen in the British Museum (reproduced in the *Handbook to the Ethnographical collections*, pl. XVII) and also by the analogous specimens in the Berlin Museum. The head has the usual opening at the top.





4. PORTRAIT OF A PRINCESS. *Bronze. Ancient Period (1360-1500)*



## Ⓒ 7. PORTRAIT OF A KING.

*Bronze. Classical Period (2nd part: 1575-1648).*

20 4/8 inches high.

He wears a cap of beadwork, from the sides of which project two curved wings and two horn-like objects in front of the face. A high collar of thirty-eight rows of corals covers the chin. The sides and the back of the head are partially covered by braids of hair and strings of coral. Three scarifications are over each brow and a large coral bead is set between the eyes. A fringe, projecting around the base, is decorated with symbolic objects in relief : human hands and figures of elephants.

Two heads, with fringe, similar to the one above, but without wings, may be seen in France : one at the Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Saint-Germain, (*Catalogue*, v. II, 1921, p. 55) ; the other in the collection of the Baron Robert de Rothschild, Paris.

According to Bernard Struck, of Dresden, the above head would represent King Akenbedo, the 15th king of Benin

REPRODUCED : Léon Deshairs, *L'Art des Origines à nos jours*, v. II, p. 422. — Lavachery, *Les Arts de l'Afrique Noire*, pl. 41. Bruxelles 1930 — *Beaux-Arts*, Mars 1930.

EXHIBITED : Les Arts anciens de l'Afrique Noire, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles 1930, n° 617. — Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 62.

## Ⓒ 8. IVORY HEAD OF A NOBLEMAN OF BENIN.

*Classical Period (1500-1691).*

5 7/8 inches high.

A vanity case in the form of a head, has a feather on the left side of the head-dress. The forehead is covered with several rows of coral beads. A high collar of pearls protects the chin. Two braids of hair hang on the left side of the face, one on the right.

Note the haughty and aloof expression of the personage's face.  
A small piece of the lower part is missing.



7. PORTRAIT OF A KING. *Bronze. Classical Period (2nd part : 1575-1648)*



## C 9. FLUTE PLAYER.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1st part: 1500-1575)*

24 5/8 inches high.

He wears a high head-gear apparently of plaited straw, with a feather on the left-side of the type described by von Luschan (See *op. cit.*, p. 235).

The back of the head is shorn. Three braids hang on the shoulders, two on the left, one on the right, ending with large pearls. As a sign of the distinction of his rank, a collar of leopard's teeth hangs around his neck.

The right hand holds to the mouth an ivory flute of the African type (with an opening on the side) with the left hand supporting it. He wears spiral bracelets. He is dressed in a garment probably of leopard-skin, entirely chiselled with decorative motives. The stiff skirt, with an extended end to the left, is held on the hip by a pendant in the form of a leopard's head fixed to the girdle.

The eyes are inlaid with iron.

REPRODUCED : *Catalogue de l'Exposition du Musée du Trocadéro*, Paris, 1932, pl. 4. — Louis Réau, *Histoire Universelle des Arts*, vol. II, p. 21. — *Cahiers d'Art*, 1932, n° 3, p. 210. — H. I. Brock, *New York Times Magazine*, 5 Mai 1935, p. 10.

EXHIBITED : Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 23. — Private Collection, Paris.

## C 10. FIGURE OF A KING.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

25 7/8 inches high.

The figure has a peculiar moustache similar to leopard's bristles. He wears a semi-circular flat-brimmed cap and a bolero with sleeves. The skirt is extended to the left. The two arms are folded on the chest. In his left hand he holds an axe vertically. Two collars are around the neck and a bracelet on each wrist.

A figure of a similar personage is in a private collection in America, known under the name of slave trader. The axe in his hand is undoubtedly a King's axe. A number of bronze plates show this emblem in the hands of the King (See Read and Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 49 and pl. 16, n° 4, 5, 6). Von Luschan writes : " It is beyond question that these great figures were nothing else but portraits of defunct kings " (*Op. cit.*, p. 289, § B). Perhaps, this is the portrait of the King who, in 1553, received the first English expedition. He was brought up to speak Portuguese. Some examples of this type wear a kind of Portuguese decoration on the chest in the shape of the Maltese Cross.

This specimen is the largest known in Benin art.

REPRODUCED : Pijoan, *Historia general del arte*, vol. I, fig. 298.

EXHIBITED : Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 22.



9. FLUTE PLAYER *Bronze. Classical Period (1st part : 1500-1575)*



❧ 11. FIGURE OF A KING. (Parts missing.)

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

9 5/8 inches high.

He wears a winged head gear with pendants hanging on each side of the neck down to the shoulders. A collar of coral beads lies loosely around the neck. The right arm is missing at the elbow. The left arm is stretched forward. The tunique of network, probably pearls, which would suggest a coat of mail, is terminated by a row of small bells. The skirt is extended to the left. It has an opening on the side. The feet are missing.

The coral dress and the position of the left arm is connected with an old custom of Court Ceremonial. The coral was the object of one of the four great yearly ceremonies. When the King appeared in public, which happened only once a year, he was garbed in coral beads from head to foot and his dress was so heavy that his arms had to be supported by attendants (See Read and Dalton, *op. cit.*, pl. 16, n° 5, and also n° 26 of this catalogue). The King's nails were very long, in Chinese fashion, and although they were protected by gold sheaths, they did not allow much movement. When Overami, the 23rd and the last King of Benin, came to surrender to the English in 1897, he appeared entirely covered with corals and surrounded by four hundred nude youths. A royal coral cap may be seen in the British Museum (See Read and Dalton, *op. cit.*, pl. 8, n° 2).

❧ 12. FIGURE OF A KING.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

20 7/8 inches high.

He wears the winged head-dress of bead network. His head is surmounted by a buckle. A high collar of coral beads hides the chin. He wears a bolero-like tunique of pearls with short sleeves. The body is exposed to the waist, but for the bands of coral beadwork across the chest. On the arms coral armlets.

The skirt (of cotton or silk) is woven in relief of stylized design including European heads, swords and leopard's figures; but whether this was a real textile design or a result of the artist's imagination is not known. The first is most likely. A row of little bells is fixed to the belt.

The loin-cloth is wrapped to the left, and a mask in the form of a European head is fixed to the hip. The right hand holding a ceremonial sword of the type designed on the loin-cloth (called "Ebere" sword) is missing; only the buckle remains.

The left arm is bent forward.

EXHIBITED : Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 24.



11. FIGURE OF A KING. *Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691)*



### C 13. EQUESTRIAN FIGURE.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1575).*

18 6/8 inches high.

The rider wears a high spiked-feather head-dress fitted to the brow by a band of pearls. Around the neck is a large collarete. He brandishes a spear, the blade of which is trimmed with small bells.

The left hand holds a bunch of arrows and a halter made of chain. A circular shield is suspended on the left side. On the right is a dagger fixed to the belt.

The garment is covered with a super-garment of leopard's skin in which shells of the cowrie type are inserted. There is a bracelet on each wrist and spurs on the ankles. The horse wears a large collar of four rows of small bells and rests upon a quadrangular open-work pedestal decorated with an interlaced design.

According to Von Luschan, (*op. cit.* p. 297) this personage is not a citizen of Benin but a foreign neighbour of high rank. At a remote period, Arabs brought horses to Benin but it was the Benin custom to ride side-saddle. Besides, the typical shield of the Benin army was not of the circular shape but of the oblong type represented on the plaque which belongs to the Musée du Trocadéro, See also Read and Dalton, *op. cit.*, pl. 16, n° 2 and 3 and n° 16 of this catalogue.

REPRODUCED : Pijoan, *Historia general del arte*, vol. I, fig. 297. — *Panthéon Magazine*, Août 1932, p. 272. — Florent Fels, *L'Art Vivant*, Août 1932. — Paul Fierens, *Nouvelles Littéraires*, Juillet 1933.

EXHIBITED : Musée du Trocadéro, 1932, n° 26.

### C 14. KING'S SCEPTRE.

*Ivory. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

13 3/8 inches high.

This has a cylindrical handle on a quadrangular base carved with an interlaced design, surmounted by the standing figure of a king, wearing necklace, cross-belt, anklets, armlets of pearls, and an ornamented loin-cloth. The carving is worn smooth.

King wears a pearl head-dress in the form of a crest of the type described by Von Luschan (*op. cit.*, p. 138). Four braids, two on each side of the head, are weighed down with beads.

### C 15. STATUE OF A WOMAN.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

8 inches high.

This represents a woman slave sitting on her heels, and holding an oval cup for gold powder in both hands.

She wears a pointed cap and a loose collar around her neck. Her body is decorated with long lines of scarifications. Note the shape of her hands and the Florentine twist of her feet.

REPRODUCED : *Cahiers d'Art*, 1932, n° 3, p. 216.

EXHIBITED : Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 30.



13. EQUESTRIAN FIGURE. *Bronze. Classical Period (1st part : 1500-1575)*



## C 16. PLAQUE.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

16 inches high.

This represents two noble personages in high relief completely clothed in regulation knight's garments. The chins are set deep in high coral neck-pieces. Loose around the necks hang the insignia of leopard teeth necklaces to which small rectangular bells are attached. Around the loins are series of bells.

The Knights wear a super garment of panther's hide decorated on the front with stylized figures (only eyes and bristles) of panthers. Their right hands clasp ceremonial swords of the "Ebere" type, their left hands hold the characteristic battle-shield of Benin warriors. Bracelets and anklets are adorned with bells.

## C 17. PLAQUE.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

19 5/8 inches high.

The plaque is cast in high relief with two princes' figures with long plaited hair parted in the middle and ending with pearls, of the type described by Von Luschan (See *op. cit.*, p. 127, fig. 218 and p. 131, fig. 226) comparable with the head-dress of certain Egyptian priests and gods of the 19th Dynasty (Von Luschan, *op. cit.*, fig. 215 A, 215 B).

The princes are nude to the waist. The skirt, with extended end to the left, is trimmed with several rows of overlapping fringes. Around the neck is a collar of a single string of beads. Shoulders-straps end with small bells.

A bell is also fixed to the hilt of the sword. A spiral armlet is on the right arm, bracelets are on the left arm.

These plaques, like those in the British Museum were used to decorate the rectangular pillars of the King's palace, as described by Dapper in 1668. Nyendaël, in 1701, no longer mentions them and it may be assumed that during the civil war which lasted from 1691 to 1701 they were brutally torn away, as the fractures in the plates indicate, and thrown into storehouses where the British found them in 1897. They show also traces of nails, a defect which offers a curious contrast to the care with which the original work was made. Consequently, it may be said that in the 18th century these plaques were again installed in the palace, but crudely this time, when previously each plaque was carefully placed in its proper grooves on the column.



16. PLAQUE. *Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691)*



## ❧ 18. BRONZE COCK.

*Classical Period (1500-1691).*

*18 inches high.*

The figure stands on an oblong base ornamented with interlaced strap-work. The entire body is covered with feathers imitating a foliage design.

About this specimen, Pijoan writes : " Treatment of his body and tail is of an incomparable discretion and taste " (*Op. cit.*, p. 236).

According to Von Luschan (*op. cit.*, p. 337) the cocks are generally very carefully finished. He does not know the use of these cocks (*op. cit.*, p. 339) but presumes that cocks being birds of sacrifice, (the people of Benin consecrated the blood to gods but ate the flesh, of which they were very fond) these sculptures were religious offerings, of the same symbolical nature as those of the antique Greece.

REPRODUCED : Pijoan, *Historia general del arte*, vol. I, fig. 309. — *Catalogue Exposition Pigalle*, 1930. — *Art et Décoration*, Paris, Mai 1930.

EXHIBITED : Exposition Pigalle, Paris, 1930, n° 127. — Palais des Beaux-Arts, Bruxelles, 1930, n° 613. — Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 45.

## ❧ 19 CEREMONIAL ELEPHANT TUSK.

*Classical Period (1500-1691).*

*Length of the outer curve : 69 inches.*

The entire tusk is decorated in relief carving. Along the outer curve are seven richly dressed figures wearing various hats and necklaces. Kings holding in mystical grips cat fish emblems. Attendants with objects of ceremonial rites. In the background are symbolic elephants' heads with trunks terminating in human hands.

For explanations of the carvings see Von Luschan, *op. cit.*, p. 465 and pl. G. to U. and also Read and Dalton, *op. cit.*, p. 15 and pl. XVIII. Such tusks had a religious meaning. They were displayed in the sanctuaries and often were fixed on the bronze heads (See Ling Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 79). Similar specimen, of a recent accession, is in the Musée du Trocadéro, Paris.



18. BRONZE COCK. *Classical Period* (1500-1691)



㉔ 20. IVORY FIGURE OF A LEOPARD.

*Classical Period (1500-1691).*

*10 inches long.*

The ornament is in the shape of a striding leopard facing left. The spots of the coat are indicated by small round holes which were originally inlaid with metal. The ears are exquisitely modelled in the shape of leaves.

The only other example of this type is in the British Museum. (Reproduced in Leo Frobenius, *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas*, p. 571).

REPRODUCED : Louis Réau, *Histoire Universelle des Arts*, II, p. 20. — Tristan Tzara, *Sculpture africaine et art moderne*, Konstrevy, p. 5, Stockholm, 1933. — *Cahiers d'Art*, 1932, n° 3, p. 199.

EXHIBITED : Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 107. — Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1935, n° 287.

㉔ 21. ARMLET.

*Ivory. Classical Period (1st part: 1500-1575).*

*5 inches high.*

Low relief carving in parallel rows with a repetition of three alternating figures in each row : two leopards, one head; two heads, one leopard. The armlet is very smooth from long wear.

This specimen, which is probably of considerable antiquity, has been damaged. This armlet is the companion piece of n° 64.759 in the Vienna Museum.

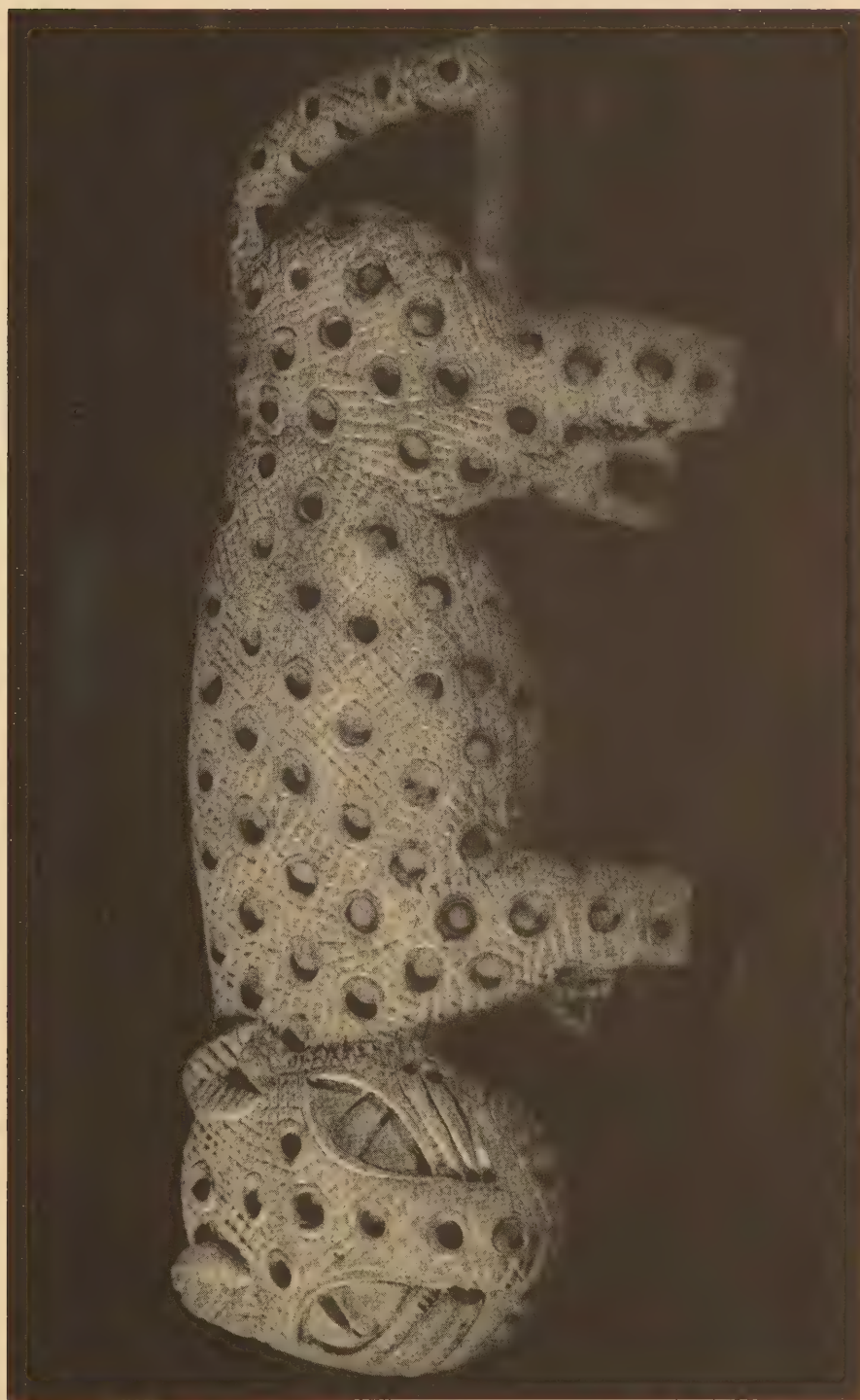
EXHIBITED : Musée du Trocadéro, Paris, 1932, n° 105.

㉔ 22. A PAIR OF ARMLETS.

*Ivory. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

*4 7/8 inches high.*

These are carved in low relief. Each one presents an alternating design of four European figures. Two figures holding a bronze money currency of horse-shoe shape, two other figures hold a hawk and a sword. They wear pleated dresses. The background is carved with panther's heads.



20. IVORY FIGURE OF A LEOPARD *Classical Period* (1500-1601)



❧ 23 AQUAMANILE (EWER) IN FORM OF A LEOPARD.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

18 inches long.

The standing animal, with the stiffened tail, suggests, even in its immobility, the suppleness of a feline. Between the ears in the form of leaves is a round orifice. The nostrils of the animal serve as a spout. The eyes are inlaid with iron.

The leopard was a sacred animal in Benin. Some leopards have been tamed and followed the King, on hunting expeditions. Reproductions of hunting leopards led on leashes with collars adorned with bells are in existence.

Contrary to convention, this leopard's body is not covered with the usual circular design representing the animal's coat.

According to Von Luschan, (*op. cit.*, p. 335) the Benin leopards are apparently related to Persian or Hispano-Moresque art.

❧ 24. EWER.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

13 1/4 inches high

The round-bellied jug with a slightly *évasé* high neck and a high base rises from a large round plaque. The handle is in the form of an undulating snake. The spout issues from the mouth of a little monkey sitting on the sloped part of the ewer. The lid is missing.

A specimen of the same type, with lower part missing, is reproduced in the catalogue of the Pitt Rivers Museum (See *catalogue*, pl. 24).

Note the similarity between this ewer and the copper jug (South Germany, end of XVth century) in the Figdor's collection (*Catalogue*, v. 5, n° 501, pl. 158).

A few other specimens of bronze vessels somewhat almost similar are in the British Museum, Leipzig Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum. However, instead of having a base, the body of the ewer usually rests on four human-like feet.



23. AQUAMANILE (EWER) IN FORM OF A LEOPARD *Bronge. Classical Period (1500-1691)*



Ⓒ 25. BRONZE STAND.

*Classical Period (1500-1691).*

*6 inches high.*

A hollowed cylindrical column on a circular base. The column is decorated in relief with four early Christian-type faces suggesting those of Byzantine or Coptic art. The ascetic expression of the faces is poignantly reminiscent of John the Baptist. Around the base, four wider heads are placed at intervals. The edge is in the form of a braid with rattles. The same ornament is at the top of the column.

The column had been afterwards reinforced on the inside with an iron tube. This piece is a unique specimen in the art of Benin.

Ⓒ 26. PENDANT.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

*7 3/8 inches high.*

This takes the shape of a shield and is edged with eyelets. It shows a group of two personages in relief: a king and an attendant supporting the king's arms. The attendant on the right side is missing.

The personages are dressed in close-fitting garment with tight sleeves, the whole of which is closely covered with cylindrical beads. They wear tall spiked caps (See Von Luschan, *op. cit.*, p. 167), armlets and anklets. Between the legs are two frogs.

On the reverse side, the ceremonial sword of the "Ebere" type is engraved. It might have been the maker's mark. The same mark may be seen on a pendant ornament n° C III 9953 in the Berlin Museum and in the Pitt Rivers Museum (cat., p. 65).

Ⓒ 27. PENDANT.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

*5 5/8 inches high.*

This semi-oval plate has rings around the edge and is decorated in high relief with a female figure of a musician nude to the waist, with a network of numerous necklaces and cross-bands. The pointed cap is beaded. The figure is striking a gong or sistrum with a long rod. The background is decorated with a foliage design (See Read and Dalton, *op. cit.*, pl. XXX, n° 5).



25. BRONZE STAND. *Classical Period* (1500-1691)



28. MUSICAL INSTRUMENT.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

13 inches high.

This represents the form of a bird (perhaps an ibis) with a long curved beak and outspread wings, resting on a tubular handle.

To produce music, a slender rod was used to strike the instrument (Read and Dalton, *op. cit.* pl. XXIX, n° 3 reproduce a group of three musicians using this instrument).

Von Luschan (*op. cit.* p. 416) counts fifteen examples of this type.

29. DOUBLE BELL (SISTRUM)

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

13 inches high.

The object is ornamented with rattles. The background is engraved with a network design.

On one side, a musician is wearing a helmet with a long spike and is playing the bird-shaped instrument. In between is a design of human heads and catfish. The feet of the musician rest directly on the head of a small figure. On the other side, stands a musician holding a rattle. In between is a design of crocodiles and of elephant heads each terminating in a human hand holding an olive branch.

On the small bell is a personage with a cross on his chest and a staff in his hand.

This musical instrument was played in the way shown on the pendant-ornament described under n° 27 of this catalogue.

30. BELL.

*Bronze. Archaic Period (?) (1140-1360).*

7 inches high.

This forms a human head, with two horns, surmounted by a ring. Lines in relief simulate scarifications.

According to B. Struck, this specimen would date from the archaic period. (See *Chronologie der Benin altertümer*, in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1923, p. 113.)

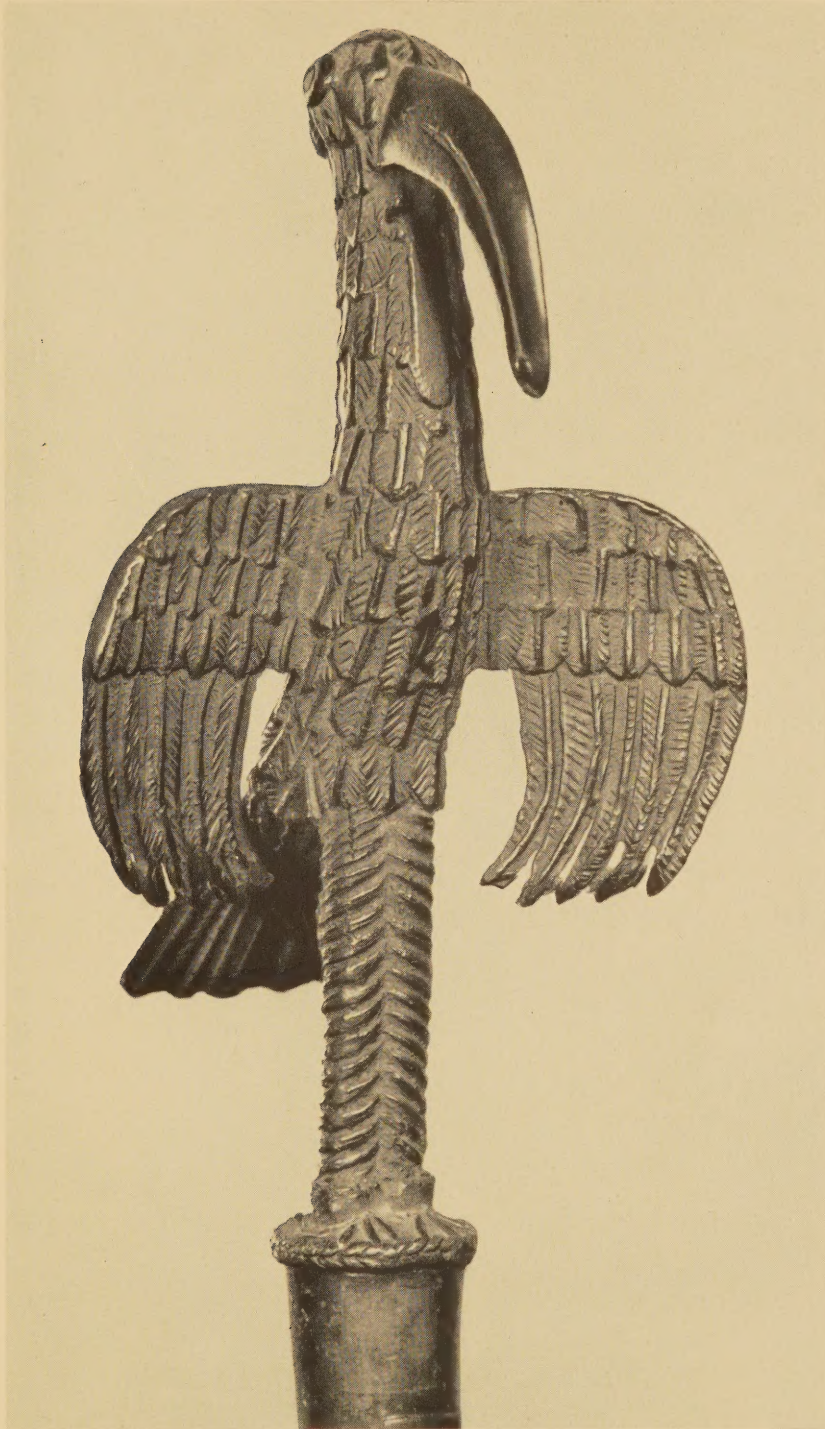
31. BELL.

*Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691).*

6 1/8 inches high.

The pyramidal shape is decorated on one side with a grotesque human face.

Bells such as the one above were worn hung around the neck or on the girdle. (See n° 16 of this catalogue.)



28. MUSICAL INSTRUMENT. *Bronze. Classical Period (1500-1691)*





NIGRITARUM REGIO, in DAPPER. *Description de l'Afrique* Amsterdam, 1686, p. 218

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